

Exchange Of Views Set In Moscow

Johnson Tells Press Of Kosygin's Reply To Jan. 27 Letter

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President Johnson announced at a surprise news conference yesterday that the Soviet Union had agreed to discuss with the United States ways to limit the arms race in offensive and defensive nuclear weapons.

The exchange of views will take place in Moscow, with Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson representing the United States, at least in the initial discussions, the President said.

On Jan. 27, Mr. Johnson wrote to Soviet Premier Kosygin about the deployment of a Soviet anti-ballistic missile system.

"I have received a reply from Chairman Kosygin to my letter of Jan. 27," the President said.

"This reply confirmed the willingness of the Soviet government to discuss means of limiting the arms race in offensive and defensive nuclear missiles.

"This exchange of views is expected to lead to further discussions of the subject in Moscow and with our allies. It is my hope that a means can be found to achieve constructive results."

The President refused to say when he received Kosygin's reply or to disclose the text of either letter.

The President's news conference was held only a few hours before Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.) addressed the Senate on Vietnam.

It was not possible to determine precisely what Kosygin had agreed to discuss. While officials generally thought that the reply constituted a major step forward, there were some who thought that the bargaining could be endless.

Mr. Johnson acknowledged that there was no promise on Russia's part to stop building its anti-ballistic-missile (ABM) system. It can continue

to expand it while negotiations continue.

The United States has acknowledged that it has a 3 or 4 to 1 long-range strategic nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union. It is obvious that this is a question Moscow wants to bargain about while the United States' first interest in the talks is bargaining over the ABM.

In his Jan. 27 letter, delivered by Thompson, the President referred only to defensive—ABM—systems. But Kosygin, as had been indicated by earlier Soviet hints, replied that discussions should embrace offensive nuclear weapons as well.

When the President was asked about this, he said that in earlier statements the United States was on record in support of negotiating on offensive nuclear weapons.

Congressional reaction to the President's announcement was swift and favorable. Sens. Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.), Everett M. Dirksen (Ill.) and J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) were among those congratulating the President and Kosygin on the decision to seek ways to limit the missile race.

In an interview, Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) said "the most significant thing" about Kosygin's offer was that it indicates that better U.S.-Soviet relations can be achieved while the Vietnam

war remains hot. But Jackson expressed doubt that the Senate would approve any reduction in U.S. offensive missiles as part of an ABM pact.

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara contends an ABM system would end up costing the U.S. \$40 billion and still would not buy full protection against enemy missiles.

While he opposes going ahead with ABM on grounds the offense can always keep ahead of the defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously have recommended building the anti-missile system as part of the overall U.S. deterrent force.

President Johnson eventually may ask McNamara to go to Moscow to help make the case for an ABM freeze. There, Soviet military and political leaders also are of two minds about the value of an ABM system.

An agreement for a missile freeze may not be a formal treaty requiring Senate approval but an informal one, according to Pentagon sources.

Other Agreements

The President was asked at his news conference whether he saw a connection between agreement on other Soviet-American issues, such as the outer-space treaty, and the agreement to discuss nuclear weapons.

He replied that he did not consider the various issues—East-West trade, consular treaty, civil air transport agreement, cultural exchange, outer-space treaty—as a package but that all were desirable on their merits.

Asked if his letter to Kosygin was prompted by the discovery that Russia was deploying an ABM system, the President replied that his letter was prompted by two primary reasons:

First, a desire to have discussions on limiting the arms race "whenever possible."

Second, a wish to attempt to reach agreement or at least to have discussions before making this "very basic decision" to build an ABM system in this country.

Asked if he thought the discussions would lead to a personal meeting with Premier Kosygin, Mr. Johnson said he did not.